

Lincoln *and* "One of the Least"

Story of a War
Correspondent

By

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MANY opportunities came in our way for rather exceptional personal service, to our fellows. I think the reader will be interested in a single example of our varied experiences, in which Mr. Lincoln appears in one of his most admirable characters. It was after Hancock's assault upon Spottsylvania that I rode over to Bell Plain and took a night boat for Washington. I engaged a stateroom, to do some writing on the trip, got my supper and strolled out upon the deck. In a snug corner, back of the wheel house, was a little drummer boy, with his own outfit, and guarding also the accouterments of an infantryman. As dusk approached I noticed him slyly nibbling a hard-tack, and, as no one seemed to be attending him, I accosted the lonely little fellow and learned his story.

His home had been in Indiana. His father had enlisted, a year ago, and left him alone with his mother. Last autumn his mother died. Like every other boy in those stirring times, he had a drum; and, from the graveside he went home, got the drum, slipped out to the railroad station and started for his father. Through the kindness of trainmen, who shared their lunches with him, the child reached Washington, and from there made his way to his father's regiment near Culpeper. Here he had spent the winter, attached to the drum corps and bunking with his father. When they broke camp he kept along with the troops, tapping off the route with his cheerful little drumsticks, across Ely's Ford to Chancellorsville, back to the Wilderness, on to Spottsylvania. Here, at Spottsylvania, his father was shot down. He

watched them lay the body in the shallow trench; and then he quietly picked up his fathers rifle, cartridge belt, knapsack, blanket roll, haversack and canteen, and started back for Indiana. He was only twelve years of age—the littlest boy I had ever seen with a regulation drummer's cap—and he had lugged this baggage (fifty pounds or so) over the twenty miles of hot, dusty roads, only stopping at Fredericksburg for a night. I got the babe a supper and put him in my bed. I borrowed, for myself, a barber's chair, and reclining by his side, tried to "mother" the little waif, cast thus into my arms from the wreck of battle.

Mr. Great-Heart

In the morning at Washington I got him a bath and breakfast, and sent an imperative telegram of inquiry to his home town in the West. I was to have a busy morning and I tried to induce the child to stay at the hotel until I returned, but the forlorn little fellow clung to me and I took him along. Having dispatched my other business, I strolled, as was my custom, out to the White House, and Mr. Lincoln instantly became interested in my companion. The boy instinctively opened his heart to him; and the President was soon possessed of all the pathetic details of the pitiful story. Then, turning to me, he said:

"Well, what are we to do with the child?"
(Do you notice that he said "we?")

I must return that afternoon; and, before I went, the boy must be placed in safe, kind hands; and Mr. Lincoln suggested that I take him to the Christian Commission. After a short conversation, on the business that

had brought me there, I started to come away. The president then gave a characteristic exhibition of his thoughtfulness. He had taken the child upon his knee; and, as he gave him a gentle caress in parting, it occurred to him that this drummer boy belonged to the army; that he had neither a discharge nor furlough; and that, in this uniform, he was liable to be taken up by the Provost Guard. Thereupon he wrote a pass, protecting the child from arrest, and I took him to the Christian Commission.

But Mr. Lincoln had not dropped out of this story. After lunch, as I had an hour or two to spare, I strolled down to the capitol, and stepped into my old place in the Senate reporters' gallery. Presently a page brought me a message from Senator Henry Wilson, of Massachusetts, asking me to come down to him. Mr. Wilson inquired about that boy.

"How did you hear of him?" I asked.

"Why, I went in to see the President, and he told me the child's story, and asked me if I could not do something for him."

My recollection is that Mr. Wilson took the boy to his home in New England. But how "like the Son of God," in His infinite compassion, was the spirit of this man Lincoln, who, in the very whirlpool of exciting public affairs, which engrossed his attention and absorbed his sympathies, would take into his heart the fortunes and faith of a little red-headed, freckly-faced vagabond from Indiana!—*From "The Christian Advocate."*

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